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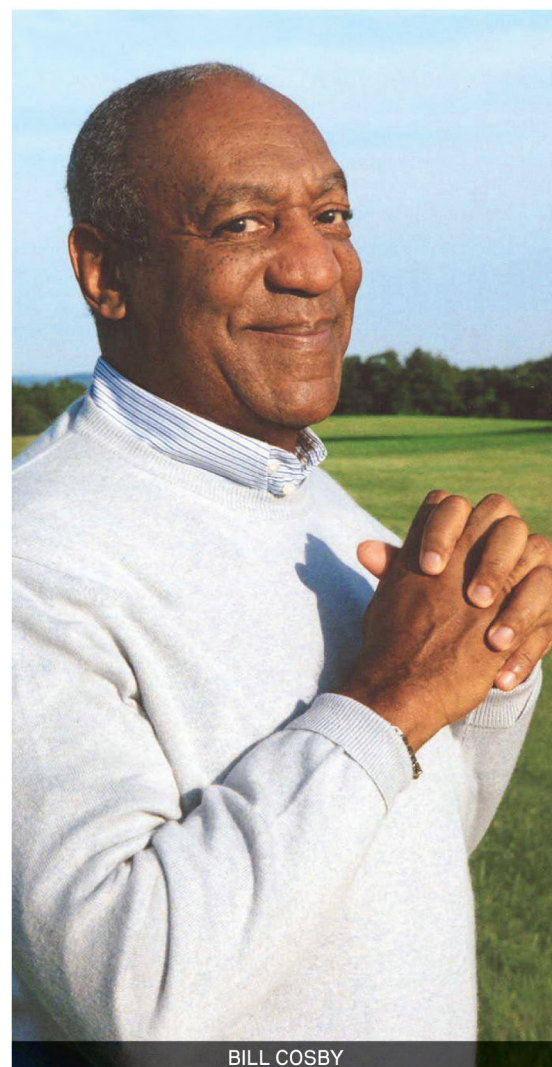
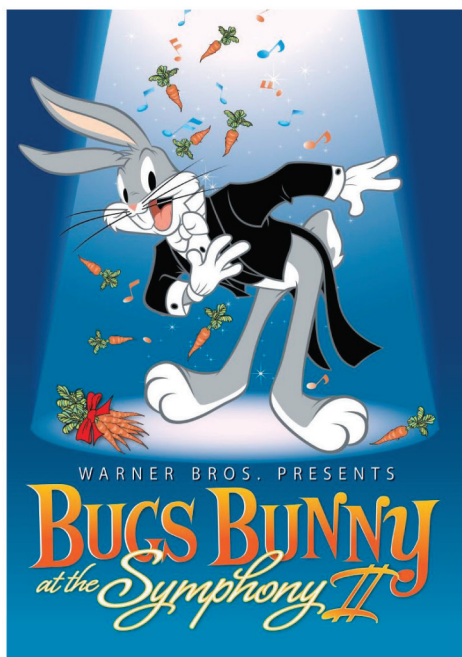
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Page 28: Photo courtesy of Out Twin Cities Film Festival. Page 42: Photo courtesy of Jean Hutar of Butcher Salt. Page 54: Photo by iStockPhoto. Page 58: Photo by Randy Stern.

ONLINE

CORRECTION

In addition to photography, Brett Dorrian of www.brettdorrianartiststudios.com also did the hair and makeup for our cover fathers on Issue 494.

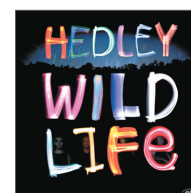


ON THE COVER

Summer in the Cities is full of folks Out in Food Trucks. Pictured here: Lisa Carlson & Carrie Summer of Chef Shack.
Photo by Mike Hnida



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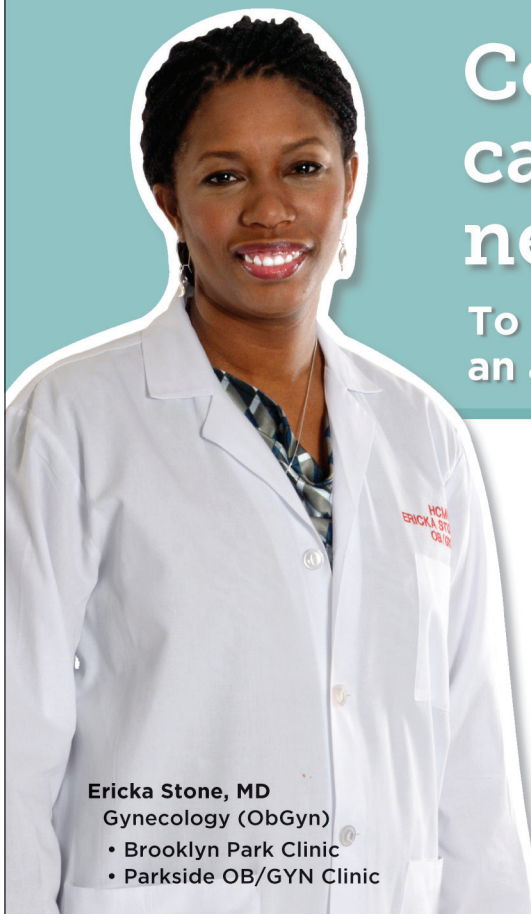
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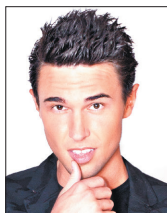
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Born This Way

My first job after high school was working in group homes with developmentally disabled men. It was my summer job through college and I also picked up shifts during the holidays when the regular staff wanted time off. Usually in my home town (but also including a few stints in St. Paul), the position was called Residential Counselor, or something like that, and I was one of a number of staff people who helped men with a variety of abilities and disabilities live their lives. If I had the morning shift, I'd help them wake up, get ready for work, take their meds, eat breakfast, and get them on their vans to go to a sheltered workshop in town where they earned money doing piece work. In the afternoons and evenings, I'd welcome them home, take them on errands like banking or grocery shopping, make dinner, do recreational things like go to movies or out to eat, pass meds, and assist with personal tasks like bathing, all to be done again the next day. And the next. Day after day. Week after week. Year after year.

I usually just called them "the guys," in a pointed way, to make them more cool and mature than how people in town usually referred to them, as "the boys." The town embraced these group homes and the people who lived in them as a part of our protective, somewhat insular small-town society. It was—and is—something that can make a small town so comfortable, the probability that nobody is anonymous, particularly the men of these homes. Waves and hugs were common while walking around town or the grocery store. Topics of conversation often had to do with going to "camp," which was a resort in Wisconsin where the guys would go each summer for a week; going home, which would happen with varying frequency depending on how involved the families were with the guys; and going for "pop," which was a common currency as a relished treat, especially during the summer.

Our activities and therapies were usually scripted and prescribed by someone with a degree in the field; but there was also plenty of free time. My formal training included First Aid, CPR, med passing, and physical restraints. We were informally trained in things like how to cook for a large number of people, how to assist men with taking baths and dressing, how to take a number of men to stores and what to do if there were problems. We certainly ran into snags at times, but the snags were usually predictable. It was a predictable pattern of life for a somewhat unpredictable group of people. They were as unpredictable as any of us are, more or less, but definitely had less personal ability or agency to live their lives on their own terms, which could also be a source of tension. Their terms were largely dictated for them and we were the gatekeepers to their lives, for the most part. It was a good system, a safe system. But, like all systems, it's only as strong as the people making it work. Its limits were because of our limits, whether personal or institutional.

This writing is a contrast to the piece I wrote in our last issue about the limitlessness of this community in terms of graduates looking toward their futures and couples looking toward having children in Minnesota's post-marriage society. This piece is all about being limited. And, I'm not talking about a euphemism for being developmentally disabled ("He's limited, you know, a little slow"), but in terms of the limits placed on people who are developmentally disabled, both formally and casually.

Looking at the routines of each day, week, month, and year, what's missing? Love. In the daily schedules of each man in each home, there were few opportunities for things like love. Every month or so,

there was a dance or mixer with other people from other homes and towns but, generally, the guys in the group homes socialized with each other. A few of them had girlfriends they'd see every once in a while, when it was scripted into the schedule by the staff of the two homes where each resident lived, and worked into the schedule. Such a date might be going to the Dairy Queen for some ice cream, and it would include one of the staff members being nearby as a chaperone, unless the resident was more independent.

What we didn't have was training about relationships and love between the residents. We weren't given official ways of dealing with one of them having a crush—same-sex or otherwise—other than relying on our own senses or those of our manager. We certainly didn't have a Rainbow Support Group for any of the guys like Wingspan does (pages 54-55), despite the fact that, statistically speaking, a number of them were—and are—likely gay (one of whom routinely and genuinely said that he loves guys [in more than an "I love everyone" kind of way]). Furthermore, in a conservative hometown like mine, such a training could not have happened back in 1995. It might not be "able" to happen now.

What I've described isn't the experience of every developmentally disabled person, but it's likely the life of many. Some may not live in group homes, but live independently. Others might still live with family, accessing their social opportunities through that family system or through programs such as those provided by places like Wingspan, but be subject to limits beyond their control.

I treasure these men—and my time with these men—so much; I learned so much from them, both specifically and as a cultural group of their own. I am hopeful that they are now allowed to seek or have relationships on their own terms, rather than the terms of their programs or Residential Counselors. I still see them when I go home; I get waves and hugs and talk about camp and pop. A couple still call me what sounds like "Underwear" because that's what "Andrea" turned into way back then, thanks to enunciation styles and rich senses of humor. I love them and I hope they get to love. And I hope that they get to define what their love looks like, rather than have it programmed into their schedules or encouraged or discouraged by staff who have their own limitations. I hope that there is a Rainbow Support Group in their area, or one in their future.

As one of the guys always said when he was explaining his developmental disability (whether with pride or remorse), he was "born this way." He was years before Lady Gaga, who touted the same sentiment in support of rights for the GLBT community, and he was just as entitled to the sentiment for his own rights to exist, to love, and to be loved. ■



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First Amendment: Putting Your Money Where Your Mouth Is

When Gay blogger Andrew Sullivan expressed disgust over the 'forced' resignation of Mozilla CEO Brendan Eich for his \$1,000 contribution to California's 2008 Propositions 8, others, including John Becker of the Bilerico Project and Michelangelo Signorile of the *HuffPost Gay Voices*, begged to differ.

Sullivan asserted Eich was a victim of "left-liberal intolerance," but Signorile pointed out that much contributed money went to TV ads spreading outright lies, "demonizing gay men and lesbians," claiming "gays are dangerous to children."

To Sullivan's sarcastic comment that Eich "had the gall to express his First Amendment rights," Becker clarified, "The damage done by those ads is incalculable, turning neighbors in California against one another, empowering anti-gay bullies in schools as well as the bashers on the streets."

As far as Eich's donation having been the sole reason for his ouster, Becker pointed out that executives supported Eich through his homophobia, but revelations that he'd backed Pat Buchanan's 1992 campaign would have left them approving a CEO that also condoned racism and anti-Semitism.

Sullivan concluded, "If we are about intimidating the free speech of others, we are no better than the anti-gay bullies who came before us."

"Wrong," wrote Becker. "Proposition 8 wasn't just some random, innocuous ballot initiative, it was a cruel, animus-driven crusade to strip a disfavored minority group of an existing and fundamental right...that relied on lies and gutter-level fear-mongering, flooding the airwaves with images of smiling children accompanied by ominous warnings about how much they'd be harmed if voters didn't enshrine marriage discrimination into the constitution."

One has the right to speak one's mind, but not without consequences. There is also a difference between uttering an occasional racial, ethnic, or sexual slur, however distasteful, and donating money with the specific intention of removing citizens' existing rights (the 9,000 legally married gay and lesbian couples) and of preventing others from ever having a right possessed by all other American citizens.

"None of this is about government censorship," summed up Signorile. "It's about a company...that has many progressive employees, as well as a lot of progressives and young people among the user base of its Firefox browser, realizing its CEO's worldview is completely out of touch with the company's—and America's—values and vision for the future." ■

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East Central Minnesota Pride. Photo courtesy of East Central

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PHOTO BY JOAN MARCUS

ARTS OF VIETNAM OPENING NIGHT EVENT

May 22 • 5:30-9pm

Jeromeo • 250 3rd Ave. N.,
Minneapolis

One of the great things about the Twin Cities is the diverse art available to view and purchase. Here's a rare opportunity to view amazing lacquer paintings coming here from a group of national treasure artists in Vietnam, including Dinh Quan, Nguyen Quoc Huy, Nguyen Hai Nam, Hung Khuynh and Hoang Trong Tien. There will also be a huge collection of beautiful looking and sounding gongs from Vietnam. The evening includes live music, wines and light food. If you can't make opening night, the works will be up through June 21. After that, they'll be having various works from a variety of artists on an ongoing basis. For the opening night event, please RSVP to info@jeromeo.com. Search "Arts of Vietnam Opening Night" on Facebook for more information.

MIX: THE ENDLESS FAREWELL TOUR

May 25 • 6pm

Union Rooftop • 731 Hennepin Ave.,
Minneapolis

Just like Cher, MIX never really goes away completely. Return to the Union rooftop — rain or shine — for a Memorial Weekend party featuring long-time residents, DJ SHIEK and DJ LENKA PARIS. As usual, there's no cover. And as usual, everyone will be there. Leave your attitude at home, come as you are and don't make any early plans on Monday... it's going to be a fun night. Search "MIX: The Endless Farewell Tour" on Facebook for more information.

A VENDER

ABOUT YOU... | BY BARRY LEAVITT



Pride

LOG JAMZ

May 30 • 10pm-2am
eagleBOLTbar • 515 Washington Ave.
S., Minneapolis

As their promotional materials state, Log Jamz is a celebration of Jamz and Logs, and everyone is welcome. Join Flip Phone's DJ Fancy Restaurant for a brand new party at eagleBOLTbar. The event includes nonstop Jamz all night, lumber inspirations, specialty timber cocktails, best plaid outfit contest, and Go-Go Lumberjacks...WOOF! This gives a whole new meaning to the term "chopping wood." \$5 cover. Search "Log Jamz" on Facebook for more information.

10TH ANNUAL EAST CENTRAL MINNESOTA PRIDE

June 1 • Noon-5pm
Voyageur Park • 600 1st Ave. NW,
Pine City

Make your way just north of the Twin Cities as Minnesota's small-town Pride once again kicks off the Pride season. The 10th Annual East Central MN Pride also marks the 15th anniversary of the event's founding organization, East Central MN Men's Circle. This is also the 10th consecutive year Pine City will be playing host to this big event. The event is a day of fun, family, community and connection. It also gives GLBT people of East Central Minnesota, those questioning, and their friends, family and allies an opportunity to meet and build community in an otherwise isolated part of the state. This year's event will be emceed by WCCO's Edward Moody, and features some great Bluegrass music by Hey Lonesome, and a special performance by Esera Tuaolo. The event is free to attend, and there'll be plenty of good food, musical entertainment, vendors, and much more. Visit <http://eastcentralminnesotapride.com> for more information. ■

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ARTS & CULTURE | SPOTLIGHT | BY JOHN TOWNSEND



Detroit. Photo by Michal Daniel

DETROIT

Through May 25

Jungle Theater, 2951 Lyndale Av. So., Mpls.

(612) 822-7063

www.jungletheater.org

Lisa D'Amour has finally written a first-rate play. *Detroit* is a searingly frank inquiry into actual economic and addiction patterns that have not only disrupted countless 21st century American lives, but a consideration of how those patterns may have possibly re-circuited society itself. Though the title is *Detroit*, it is meant to be any first-ring suburb in any mid-sized US city. That's part of the problem of course: there's a corporatized sameness to all American suburbs, far more extreme than it was a generation ago.

Angela Timberman and John Middleton, both terrific, play Mary and Ben, an early-middle-aged couple. She works. He's been laid off and says he's developing his own business online. D'Amour seems to insuate that the internet aids and abets delusions about economic possibilities and our own inflated abilities. Is she subtly debunking the myth that in America you don't need anyone? Hearty individualism will always save the day, right?

Next door, a young couple newly moved in, Sharon and Kenny, are played with rowdy abandon and vapidty as the characters wrestle with lingering addiction issues. Anna Sundberg and Tyson Forbes find an oozy sexual chemistry and a sense of danger that at times is downright riveting. Their individualism has been sub-

sumed by the drugs they've done and the psycho-physical damage left by that. In addition, a splendidly natural Jay Hornbacher plays a senior citizen supporting role that puts a twist into the works.

Both very different couples form bonds between one another while hanging out in their backyards. Set designer and director Joel Sass makes those ordinary yards captivating and he does something extraordinary with the set that I won't write about. You have to see it. It's also some of the seasoned Sass's best directorial work ever. As for Timberman, it's the best thing she has done since *The Sisters Rosensweig* at Park Square and Forbes, his best work since the Ordway's *Cabaret*. However, a show that goes well over an hour and a half *without* an intermission is not reasonable, no matter how wonderful the actors are.

THE DRUNKEN CITY

Through June 7

Lyric Lab

756 Hampden Ave., St. Paul

(612) 724-5685

www.darkstormy.org

Adam Bock's stunning satire about unconstitutional surveillance and brutality, *The Receptionist*, was a big hit for Dark & Stormy Productions at the end of last year. Now they're presenting another work by

the same celebrated gay playwright that looks into that proverbial Dionysian ritual known as the Bachelorette Party just before the wedding.

Actress Sara Marsh shares, "Adam's play is so cleverly and delightfully deceptive: it appears to simply be a group of girls (played by Tracey Maloney and Adelin Phelps) giving their friend (my character, Marnie) one last night partying in the city before she gets married and settles down in their small town. But for Marnie, the night becomes a sudden and unexpected exploration of love, happiness, needs, and expectations: societal pressures about what love is and what it should look like, the expectations family and friends have of us—whether they're aware of it or not—to make certain life decisions, and the intense pressure we put on ourselves to please others, even if it may come at the cost of our own personal happiness."

"Until this night in the city, Marnie hasn't confronted any of these issues consciously, so now that her wedding is imminent and she's in an inebriated state, it doesn't take much of a catalyst (a cute, kind guy named Frank, played by Kris L. Nelson) to get her gears turning. And though Marnie's story provides the most consistent through-line and backbone of the show, the play is far more than just her pre-wedding



The Drunken City. Photo by Mel Day

excitement and questioning. For each of the characters, it's an exploration and sometimes realization of what love and commitment are, how they are different than what we may have thought, and what they truly mean. What do we owe ourselves? How does that impact what we feel we owe others? Where do those things intersect? Do they? What is love, what is happiness, and are they even related? And what do you hold onto and what do you sacrifice to have one or the other or both, what's the cost? We (all) continue to ask ourselves these questions throughout our 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and on. There's no easy answer because the definition and formula for love and happiness is constantly changing. Gay, straight, wealthy, struggling, older, younger; this play speaks to everyone, because the desire for—and struggle to find—both love and happiness is constant and universal."

Director Bill McCallum adds, "Adam's choice to place these three brides-to-be in a strange and dangerous setting, under the influence of truth-inducing alcohol, provides a fabulous context for the exploration of issues that we all face in our lives. The play is not prescriptive. It doesn't offer any answers. But it does pose many interesting questions about love and loneliness and honesty and friendship and societal expectations, and how our need for connection influences the choices we make in our lives."

GYPSY

Through May 25
Bloomington Civic Theatre, 1800 W. Old Shakopee Road.
(952) 563-8575
www.bloomingtoncivictheatre.org

Gypsy is one of the towering musicals of American theater. But then how could it not be with Jule Styne as its composer, Stephen Sondheim as its lyricist, and master gay playwright and screenwriter, Arthur Laurents, as its book writer.

The true life character of Rose is the mother of striptease artist, Gypsy Rose Lee. Sally Ann Wright plays Rose at Bloomington Civic and you may recall her marvelous performance there in Sondheim's *Follies* a while back. (In case you didn't know, BCT is one of the best local producers of musical theater and Sondheim is their *forte*.) Wright, as one would expect, researched her role diligently. She relates, "A romp with the hotel manager in the script is funny and charming, whereas in real life she actually threw a manager from a hotel window. She was ruthless, cunning, and, when she wanted to,



Gypsy. Photo by Zach Curtis



The Three Musketeers.
 Photo by Dan Norman

(could be) charming. She made her girls lie about their ages to the point that they honestly didn't *know* how old they were! Time after time, she drove husbands and lovers away simply because she was exhausting and drained the people around her of anything she could get from them."

"I don't think Rose had an honest relationship in her life. She simply didn't have the capacity for it. She had many relationships with both men and women, none of them successful. But she raised two stars. It's an interesting conundrum, isn't it? When *Gypsy* was diagnosed with lung cancer in 1969 she said to her sister June, 'This is my present, you know, my present from mother.' You see, when Rose died of colon cancer in 1954 her final words to *Gypsy* were, 'wherever you go I'll be right there... When you get your own personal kick in the ass, just remember, it's a present from me to you.'"

ONE FLEA SPARE

Through June 7
Soap Factory,
514 Second St. SE, Mpls.
www.tempotickets.com

Theater Coup d'Etat is staging Naomi Wallace's *One Flea Spare*. Director James Napoleon Stone relates that it "uses the 1665 (bubonic) plague of London to serve as a backdrop for people stripped of all first-world amenities we use to define ourselves even today, such as wealth, class, and the power associ-

ated with them. Now forced to rely on one's own morals and intuition to survive, we see the innate power of human empathy and sexuality either honored or disregarded. Sexuality comes forth as one of the innate characteristics that makes us human, that gives us worth."

London was a center of plague activity throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance. However, for all that horror, the city still managed to be a vibrant, bawdy, and consummate artistic center. Wallace's play will be worth catching to learn something about how to let life and living take center stage in the face of grave illness rather than let it define who you are with 'terminal' limitations. One has to wonder how, despite the plague outbreaks, London would always rise above the paranoia and carry on!

THE THREE MUSKETEERS

Through May 25
Guthrie Theater
818 So. 2nd St., Mpls.
(612) 377-2224
www.guthrietheater.org

Walking Shadow Theatre Company plays the Guthrie's Dowling Studio again. Company Man John Heimbuch is a man with a great instinct for European cultural history since the Renaissance, not to mention gender roles. He has reimagined Alexandre Dumas' classic novel, first serialized in 1844, for the stage. He shares, "When I began this adaptation of *The Three Musketeers*, I was surprised by the main characters' cavalier approach to honor and privilege. Despite their heroic bravura, these nobly born men were opportunistic, deceitful, sexually duplicitous, gold-digging, and physically aggressive in order to achieve their aims. Naturally, they're young. The musketeers are in their early 20s, and d'Artagnan only nineteen, so no wonder they act with the bold urgency of youth. But what I find most interesting is that their greatest threat doesn't come from other men, but from an opportunistic woman. The musketeers' main adversary, Milady de Winter, is the prototypical femme fatale: dangerous, intelligent, attractive, mysterious, empowered. She represents a perfect mirror to their own questionable moral privilege." ■

ADAM QUALLS

A TWIN CITIES ACTOR MOVING UP



Adam Qualls of *Shrek*. Photo by Sarah Morreim

In less than five years Adam Qualls has worked in some of the Twin Cities' top theaters and with top directors. The résumé he has grown since he arrived could be the envy of any number of actors locally and across the country. Of course, having a knack for comedy is almost a must for Twin Cities theater advancement. And that's something that the Millikin University (Decatur, Illinois) graduate defi-

nately has. Qualls is also a natural for character roles and musicals. That versatility has been serving him well, obviously, because not only did he act in every Children's Theatre Company production during the 2012-2013 season, but he also is presently in that theater's hit staging of the musical, *Shrek*. I recently asked him about his rather swift ascent.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 26 ➔

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JT: You're from St. Louis? What brought you to the Twin Cities?

AQ: Yes, a small town outside St. Louis. In 2009, a year after graduating college, I came up here to work for CLIMB, a company that does educational plays at schools all over the upper Midwest. I had an apartment in downtown St. Paul, but since we were always on the road, I only saw it on the weekends. After that job ended, I found the Twin Cities so ripe with opportunity for artists like me that I decided to give it a try. My first gig was *Bye Bye Liver: The Twin Cities Drinking Play*, and that was in the summer of 2010.

JT: What have you liked about Twin Cities life?

AQ: People here are smart. And they don't mess around in the summertime: it's a three-month block party.

JT: You've made quite a mark in a short time and have been directed by top directors: Marion McClinton, Joe Chvala, Peter Rothstein, Peter Brosius, Joel Sass, and John Cranney. And you've done roles in theaters known for their musicals: Bloomington Civic, Theater Latté Da's *Cabaret*, and now—yet again—you're at Children's Theatre. Pretty impressive credentials to add to your résumé. How did this come about?

AQ: Seriously, though: when you put all those names down together like that, even I stop and say "Wow!" Of course there are days when I focus more on all I haven't done and all the people I haven't worked with, but I'm really very lucky to have worked as much as I have in four years. And that's the short answer to your question, I guess: luck. A cop-out answer, maybe? I also work hard, but so does everyone else in this community. I'm genuinely surprised every time I get a job, and that's probably a better state of mind than feeling entitled to everything.

JT: Can you tell me about some of the directors you've worked with and what you learned from them?

AQ: I could write a book of things I've learned from directors, but I'll mention a couple: Brosius, for instance, pushes you. He demands excellence. From him I've learned never to stop coming up with new ideas and committing to them 150 percent. On the other hand, Rothstein really knows what he wants from the start, he's very specific. He's also pretty much always the smartest guy in the room, showing us all that, yes, something as small as turning one's head on one line as opposed to the next really can clarify the storytelling.

JT: What character do you play in *Shrek* and what did you do to prepare for the role?

AQ: I play Lord Farquaad, the villain! Rothstein last cast me as a Nazi, so that prepared me a little for Farquaad's hatred of non-conformity, which might be projected self-hatred (not to get too Freudian). But I feel like my lifelong love of old-school camp humor prepared me the most for this role. The biggest validation of that during the rehearsal process came from the costume designer, Rich Hamson: at one point, he told me he half-expected Farquaad to say, "Butchya ARE, Shrek, ya ARE in that chair" (a-la Bette Davis to Joan Crawford



A small—but mighty funny—Adam Qualls as Lord Farquaad. Photo by Dan Norman

in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*). I was flattered by the comparison, but even more flattered that he knew I'd get the reference.

JT: Do you plan to stay in the Twin Cities?

AQ: As far as I'm concerned, I'm still just getting started in the Twin Cities, and have more ahead of me than behind. This isn't a city of gypsies like NYC, so sometimes I do feel a little left out having no roots here. But that just means I've got to create some. ■

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OUT TWIN CITIES FILM FESTIVAL AT MALL OF AMERICA

BY JOHN TOWNSEND



Photo courtesy of Out Twin Cities Film Festival

Theatres at Mall of America will host this year's Out Twin Cities Film Festival. It's a nice fit given that MOA is a crossroads of all kinds of travelers from all ends of the earth. And OTCFF has a range of fascinating films from different parts of the planet. Festival Director Chris Durant has a reason to crow because in five short years the festival has screened over a thousand films, held loads of post-show discussions and interviews, is a five-day international event, and of course, the world's most famous mall is certainly something to write home about. Drive, bus, or take the light rail. What a perfectly cosmo destination to see queer cinema!

The fest's Opening Night is Wednesday, June 4, with the small town coming of age story, *American Vagabond*, made by talents from both the US and Finland. The documentary, *The Rugby Player*, is about the lives of Mark Bingham, a passenger on United Flight 93 of 9/11 infamy and his mother, Alice Hoagland, a former United flight attendant. The evening ends with *The Little House That Could*, a documentary about Emmy-winning stylist, Patricia Field (*Sex and the City*), who has spent decades in outreach to transsexuals, drag queens, ostracized small town GLBT folk, queer youth, and butch lesbians. The House of Field is shown to be a innovative force in the music and fashion scene. *The*



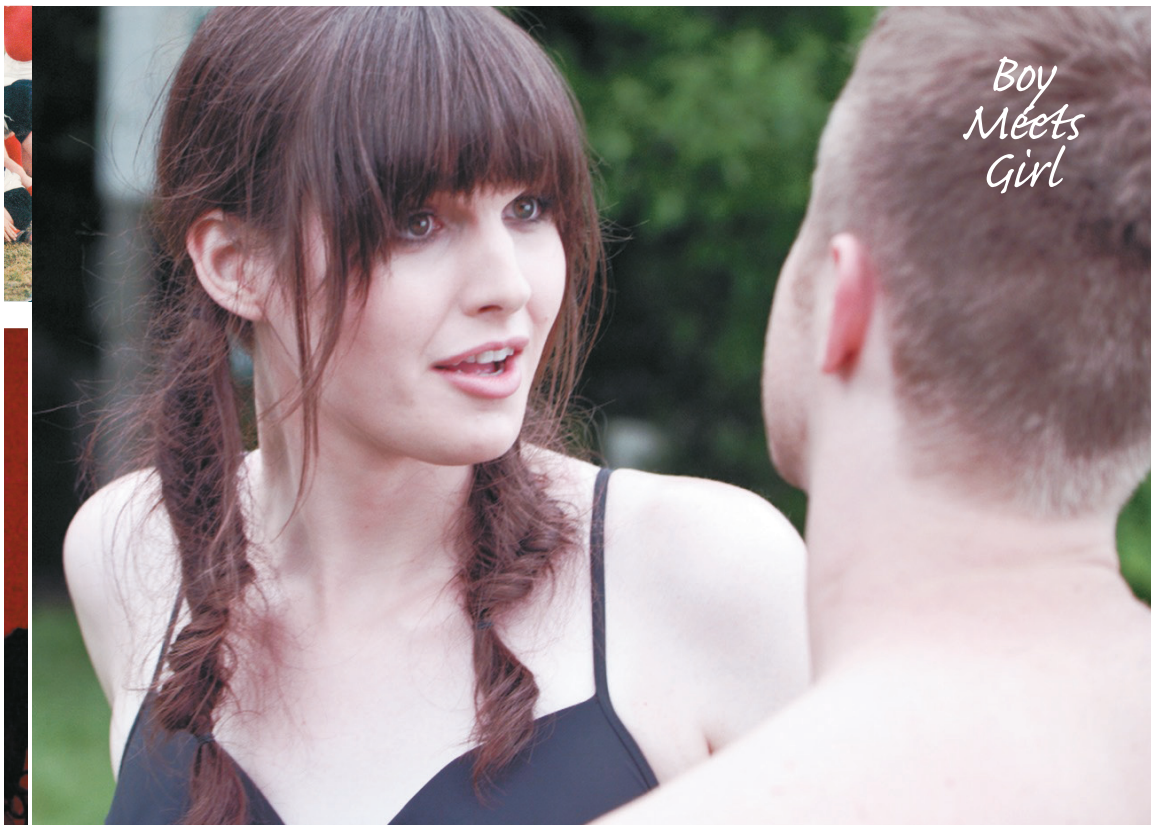
Drunktown's Finest



Kuma Hina



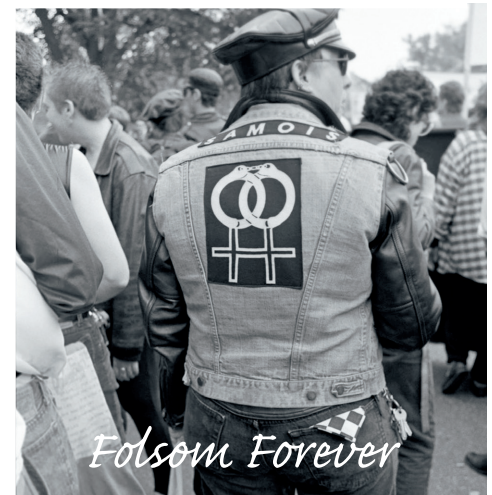
Skanks



Boy Meets Girl



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Folsom Forever

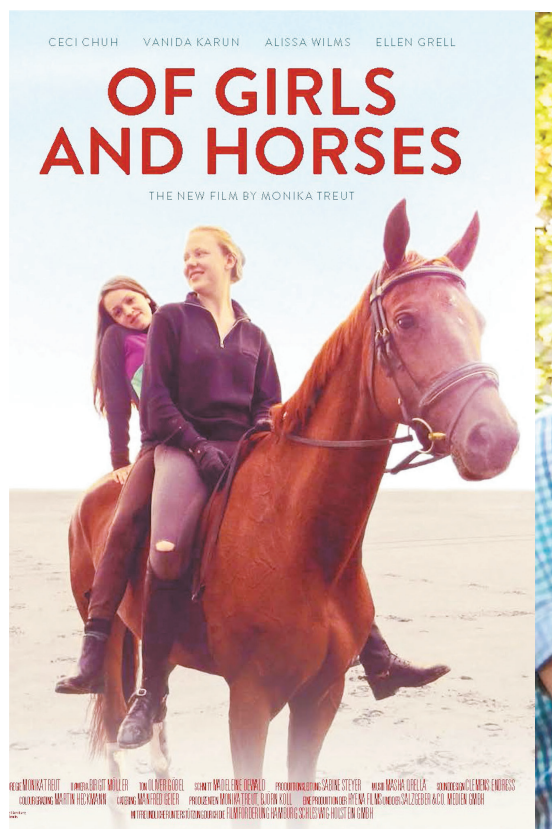
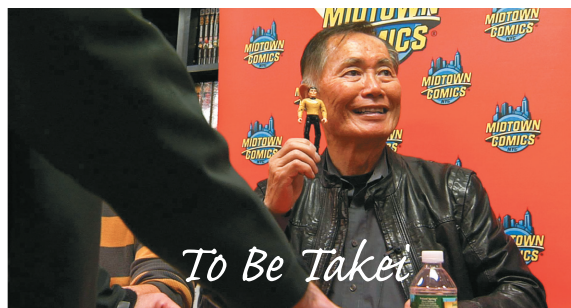
Little House That Could's Toronto director, Mars Roberge, is the center of a post-screening discussion.

On Thursday, June 5, experience a cross-cultural feast for the mind. In Kentucky a transgender girl, her best friend since childhood, and a beautiful young debutante intertwine in *Boy Meets Girl*. *Drunktown's Finest* examines the Navajo nation in New Mexico from a uniquely queer perspective. In *Kuma Hina*, Pacific Islander culture is at odds with Western culture, seen through the eyes of a *mahu* (a transgender woman).

Friday, June 6, is the night for festivalgoers to howl! The evening is titled 'Pro-

vacateur Section' and pushes the erotic and genderbending envelope. Think of it as a night for transgression. When you think of community theater you may think of *Barefoot in the Park* or *Guys and Dolls*. But in Birmingham, Alabama, an amateur troupe created an original drag musical titled *Skanks in a One Horse Town*. In a town where football and Jesus consume the lion's share of interest and obsession, committed thespians countered that in 2012. *Skanks*, directed by David McMahon, reports on that. In *Power Erotic*, documentarian Lawrence Ferrara explores the power of masculinity in relation to dominance and human sexuality. Gay perspectives and fantasies, conversations about powerful sexual experiences,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 30 ➔



and gay childhood are part of this film's fascinating mix. Todd Lillithun's short film *Safe Word* will be shown with it. And you can imagine what that's about. Ferrera will speak at a live Q & A afterwards.

Not to be outdone, *Folsom Forever* looks behind the scenes and under the sequins of San Francisco's rebelliously kinky street festival. Director Mike Skiff will take questions afterward. It's accompanied by the short film, *Narcissist*.

Saturday, June 7, is a big day with a presentation of short films. There's also *The New Black*, Yoruba Richen's documentary about divisions among African Americans regarding the marriage equality issue. Germany's iconic Monika Treut has directed *Of Girls and Horses* in which a teenaged girl and a horse-

loving lesbian in her 30s form a special bond. If you love dance, then check out *Five Dances* about five dancers dealing with the New York dance scene, directed by Alan Brown.

A highlight of OTCFF is certainly *To Be Takei*, a documentary about actor George Takei who came out in his 60s and married husband Brad in his 70s. You'll remember Takei from *Star Trek*. It was a series that reshaped how many of us see life and the universe. And Takei is a man who reshaped how countless people have looked at race and homosexuality, particularly through high-profile activity on Facebook. And that master of zany gay prettyboy comedies, JC Calcano, gives us *The 10 Year Plan*, that has two gay pals with opposite tastes in men but a



Silent Youth



Kidnapped for Christ



John Apple Jack



Such Good People

backup plan with each other. The vibrant Calciano will field questions afterwards.

Sunday, June 8, serves up lots of food for thought, especially when it comes to young GLBT people. From Germany, *Silent Youth* looks at coming out and navigating new relationships, feelings, and experiences. Two local progressive churches—Westminster Presbyterian and Grace-Trinity Community—steer a panel discussion after the screening of *Kidnapped for Christ*. A chilling behavior modification program that abducted American teens and forced them to attend an ex-gay school in the Dominican Republic is put under the microscope. The Queer Media Project will present family-friendly shorts. There will be more general queer shorts as well. *John Apple Jack* muses on the issue of commitment and

gay men over time. *Such Good People* is a contemporary screwball comedy about the illusions of the American Dream, which not-so-oddly enough, many GLBT people want their share of. ■

OUT TWIN CITIES FILM FESTIVAL

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SUMMER OF PRIDE 2014

BY SHANE LUECK



10TH ANNUAL SUMMER OF PRIDE KICKOFF PARTY

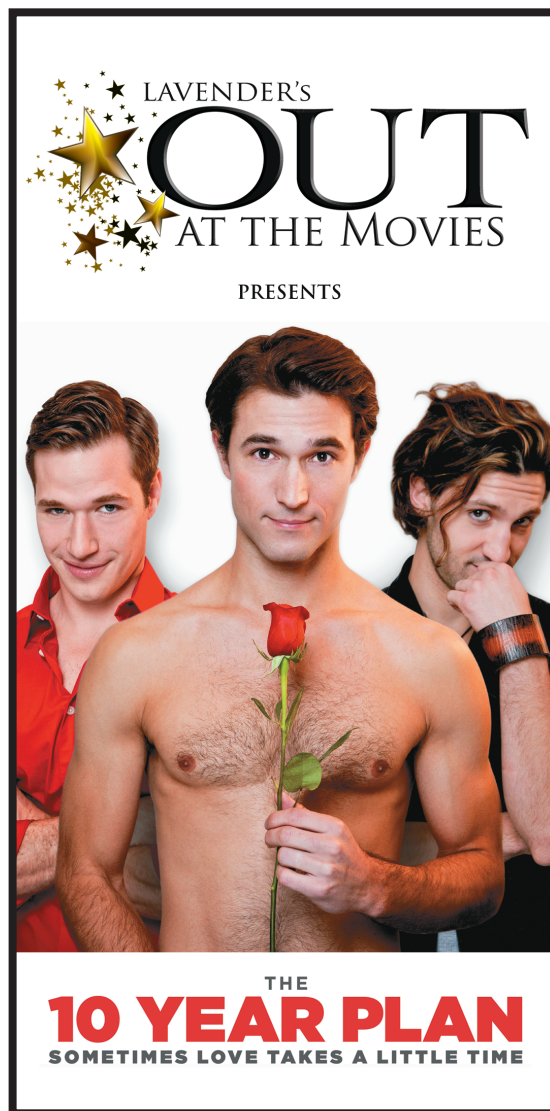
June 5

5:30 – 8:00 PM

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It's a Star Spangled Summer, and you can start it off with a bang by enjoying complimentary hors d'oeuvres, wine and cocktail sampling, drink specials, and registering to win great prizes. Visit booths from HRC Twin Cities, Minneapolis Movie Bears, OutFront Minnesota, TCGMC, Twin Cities Pride, Prime Timers MSP, Twin Cities Quorum, North Country Bears, Red Ribbon Ride, Aliveness Project, and other local non-profit events to find out the great events going on this Pride and over the summer.



LAVENDER'S OUT AT THE MOVIES

June 17

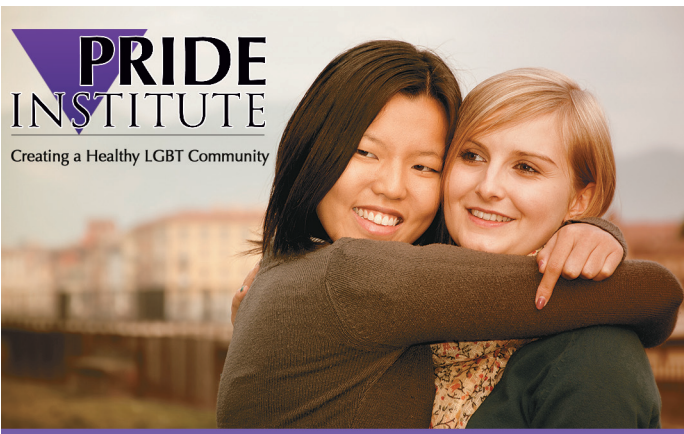
Doors: 6:45 PM • Movie 7:30 PM

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"The 10 Year Plan" – Sometimes love takes a little time! Join Lavender and the Minneapolis Movie Bears to enjoy this new romantic comedy about two best friends who make a pact to be together if they are both still single in ten years' time. Come join in what has become a fun-filled tradition for movie lovers in the GLBT community.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 36 →



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QUORUM SECTION

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Quorum is the Twin Cities GLBT & Allied Chamber of Commerce. Quorum champions the business case for a fully inclusive community as a conduit for economic development and a leader in the continuum of change. Quorum is an affiliate for the National Gay & Lesbian Chamber of commerce (NGLCC) in Washington D.C.

QUORUM'S 2014 COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AWARDS

Always a very special night for Twin Cities Quorum, this year is no exception. Hosted by our former Executive Director – Sam McClure - we honored the following exceptional people and organizations in our community.

QUORUM BUSINESS OF THE YEAR – THE BARTMANN GROUP

The Bartmann Group consists of GiGi's, Bryant Lake Bowl, Bread and Pickle, Pat's Tap, Red Stag Supper Club, Barbette & The Tiny Diner. These restaurants have long been known for their dedication to the LGBT community and

the community at large. The Bartmann Group contributes to the community in ways that are sustainable, supporting local non-profits and small businesses alike, all while keeping the theme of inclusion and welcoming everyone.

QUORUM NON-PROFIT OF THE YEAR – RECLAIM – JANET BYSTROM

When faced with the closure of Face to Face due to budget cuts and the loss of a physical space of District 202 in 2009, Janet led a strong group of passionate volunteers & spearheaded a grassroots fund raising drive to ensure something would be there to support the clients she had been serving. That 'something' was Reclaim! Reclaim has now just celebrated their 5 year anniversary and is clearly here to stay to serve our LGBTQ youth.

QUORUM BUSINESS LEADER OF THE YEAR – RICHARD ROSS HEROD III – WHITE BEAR MITSUBISHI

Along with the efforts of so many, Richard helped defeat the anti- marriage amendment and founds ways to get the message out that were unique to him – notably with his Vote No car warp campaign. He also continues to find ways to better the community at large by using his business as a vehicle to promote fundraisers and awareness to events and causes. Richard communicates passionately to both the deaf and hearing population.

QUORUM INCLUSION LEADER OF THE YEAR – MARCUS WATERBURY OF MORGAN STANLEY

Marcus is a quiet leader who leads by example using courage and honesty. Before and after his transition while working for a Fortune 500 Company, Marcus has worked hard to bring awareness to LGTB issues. In 2013, as a board member of the National Center for Transgender Equality he was invited to the White House. He is always willing to share his story and experience to help overcome fear and discrimination in the workplace and community.

QUORUM LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD – BARBARA SATIN

Barbara Satin is an inspiration to all. She works tirelessly, and seemingly effortlessly to be a voice and an advocate - particularly for transgender people and aging issues. Last year, Barbara's brainchild and labor of love - Spirit on Lake Apartments opened. Spirit on Lake is a senior living complex geared to the GLBTA community. The first of its kind in the Twin Cities, and only the second one in the US, it is considered to be a model for the rest of the country.

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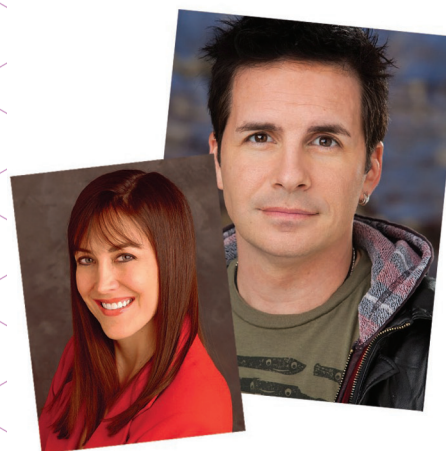
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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 32

SUMMER OF PRIDE 2014



LAVENDER'S PRIDE THURSDAY

June 26

5:30 – 8:00 PM

Orchestra Hall

1111 Nicollet Mall, Minneapolis

Kick off the Twin Cities Pride Weekend with the Twin Cities' biggest happy hour event, followed by a performance by comedienne Margaret Cho. Stop by for a FREE Lavender Pride Thursday Happy Hour featuring complimentary hors d'oeuvres, wine and cocktail sampling, drink specials, and the chance to register to win great prizes. Afterward, enjoy an evening of comedy by the incomparable Margaret Cho. Purchase tickets for the Margaret Cho performance at www.tcpride.org.



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August 15

7:10 PM

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Psycho Suzi's. Photo by Hubert Bonnet

TASTE BUDS WITH PAT EVANS: PAT ASKS WHERE'S YOUR FAVORITE PATIO?

BY PAT EVANS

PSYCHO SUZI'S MOTOR LOUNGE

Pat's Pick

For more than 10 years, this Nordeast institution has saved many of us from going over the edge after a long winter. I like to think of Suzi's as tiki kitsch therapy. Sitting outside on the expansive riverfront patio with its great views of the Mississippi on a warm day or night never fails to restore me. While sipping on one of the hilariously named tropical drinks, (I particularly enjoy the Psycho Zombie) the deeper meaning of life can be explored with friends...or not. Fresh pizzas, sandwiches, apps, and salads are tasty and reasonably priced.

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ASTER CAFÉ

Beth Dooley, Wilderness Inquiry guide, foodie, cookbook author, and blogger

My favorite place to dine outside is Aster Cafe in St. Anthony Main, at sunset just as the lights begin to come on across the river, its roar faint background to the bustle of bikes and strollers on a soft summer's night. The food is simple, fresh and easy. We often bike there on the Greenway, the thrill of whizzing along the River path makes me feel like a kid, especially the ride home, through the moist gentle night air with stars peppering the velvety sky.

125 SE Main St.
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www.astercafe.com



Aster Café. Photo by Mike Hnida

THE GREEN ROOM

Lee Valsvik, KOOL108 and KARE11

It's only the second full summer for the rooftop patio at The Green Room in downtown Stillwater (of course!). It's small, but that's what makes it so good. The view overlooks the St. Croix River and the Stillwater Lift Bridge. The food is tremendous and co-owner and chef Christopher Durant loves using local sustainable foods. This Spring, he'll use ramps, morels, fiddleheads, etc., and I can't wait. There are a lot of exciting things happening in Stillwater. A new bridge in 2016 is going to bring changes to downtown. One of the coolest proposals is turning the two blocks of Chestnut Street in front of the lift bridge into a pedestrian plaza. When this is all happening, I'll be on the roof of The Green Room with a glass of wine taking it all in.

Can you tell I'm on the board of the Stillwater Area Foundation promoting it all? Exciting stuff.

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www.tgrstillwater.com

PARADISE LANDING

Frank Vascellaro, WCCO-TV

Most of our summer is spent at our cabin in western Wisconsin. There's a great outdoor place on Balsam Lake called Paradise Landing that we like to visit. It has a huge and lovely outdoor space. The patio overlooking the lake has a fire pit, plenty of seating and a grassy area where antsy kids can run around. Sit back in the sun, enjoy some good food and drinks and watch the boats float by. It's a perfect combination of the water and great north woods.

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OUT IN THE FOOD TRUCKS

BY JOY SUMMERS

Mobile cuisine has fast gone from trend to full-on movement. Gazing down over Marquette Avenue from the above skyway, it's a beautiful sea of colorful trucks serving a vast variety of cuisines. It all began not long ago with the arrival of a trailer run by two accomplished chefs, who are partners in every sense of the word. As this summer heats up, we chatted with them, along with several other chefs and business owners, who are out and proud on the city streets.

CHEF SHACK

Carrie Summer and Lisa Carlson met at a job interview. Carlson was in need of a sous chef and they clicked instantly. As their relationship blossomed, they found a shared dream in running a mobile food business even as both of their culinary stars continued to shine at other critically lauded restaurants. What began with a small trailer they called the **Chef Shack** at the Mill City Farmer's Market has become a fleet of trucks and two restaurants: one amongst the beautiful vistas in Bay City, Wisconsin, and the new

Chef Shack Ranch in Minneapolis' Seward neighborhood.

"We weren't ready for a restaurant," Summer said. "We were well-paid chefs for other people. Three years into the business, we still worked in other endeavors full time because the trucks are so seasonal." What they did with their valuable off-time was travel, which is where they were inspired by the street food they found, like the exotic aromas of Indian spices or the comforting adobo of Indonesia. Their goal was to make delicious food more accessible and remove

pretense from great dining.

While they were early, they may not have technically been the first truck on the scene. "I think our Ethiopian friends of the She Royal trucks might have actually filed the license first," Summer corrected me. They have established themselves as leaders in the movement, even inviting potential food truck business owners to stage with them. Culinary dreamers have come from as far as New York City and California to see if they have the stomach for this challenging business. Not only are our trucks hampered by a



Janene Holig of Hot Indian Foods.
Photo by Katrina Ecklund

ridiculously short season, but there are always bumps to avoid with a new business. "It's all hands and elbows inside the truck." Some of the useful tips are simple, like making sure you have a full propane or gas tank, to more truck-specific tips like tying down your condiments before getting on the freeway or battenning down your service window so it doesn't get taken off while driving under a bridge.

In addition to balancing the demands of the business, the duo do what they can to make certain to leave work at the door when they are at home. "Travel helps," said Summer. "It's magical." They also know their jobs. "At work, she's Chef Carlson and I'm her sous. We all report to her. Someone has to be the boss." Meanwhile, Summer handles the private bookings (all of their trucks are available for catering events) and marketing, like dealing with pesky food writers with the utmost grace. "It's a challenging business in a challenging industry to be a woman, but we do this because we love it. We're blessed to feed people."

HOT INDIAN FOOD TRUCK

One of the newer trucks is the tangerine colored **Hot Indian Food Truck** where Chef **Janene Holig** serves up Indoritos or their Charlie Award-winning fries spiced



Carrie Summer and Lisa Carlson of Chef Shack. Photo by Mike Hnida

CONTINUED ON PAGE 44 ➔

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Tamara Brown of Sassy Spoon. Photo courtesy of Tamara Brown

with a heady mix of aromatics, herbs, and spices. "Seasonings are meant to be intensified in the cooking process," she told me. She was lured into the truck by the passion of truck owner Amol Dixit and the promise of the open road. She thrives on the challenge and spontaneity of the business that has them rolling through all sorts of locations from downtown Minneapolis and now into their new stall inside the Midtown Global Market.

Hot Indian will be taking over the former Left Handed Cook space and is looking to open any day now. This will cap a busy year for Holig who is just settling into married life, which she swears was only coincidentally planned around food truck season. "My wife is extremely supportive and exciting. She made the complex timing of both pretty easy for me."

Since their debut on the streets Hot Indian has been drawing crowds, praise, and fans. Pinning down the best moment inside the truck, though, is hard to say. "Opening night at Harriet Brewing,

bouncing the truck all the way across Loring Park for PRIDE Beer Dabbler, serving outside City Hall for the Freedom to Marry first weddings, betting the ponies at Canterbury, crashing Vikings training camp, attending the Charlie's, but



Jean Hutar of Butcher Salt. Photo courtesy of Jean Hutar

the best was the Bollywood flash mob that 'mysteriously' appeared behind our truck on Nicollet Mall for India's Independence Day!" It's been a whirlwind year.

BUTCHER SALT

This season is only just beginning and the newest truck on the scene is the flat black and white lettered **Butcher Salt** run by **Jean Hutar**. She was successfully overseeing several Chipotle restaurants when she decided to make the move to independent, mobile business. She was inspired by Hola Arepa to make the move: their incredible food and infectious enthusiasm got her creative wheels turning. With the love and support of her partner Shari, she found a truck and got to work. Her truck serves several sandwiches and sliders, their specialty. "We're both workaholics," said Hutar. "We love what we do and when we get home at night we can't wait to share it with each other."

An ambitious soul, she's not the sort of person to stand by the sidelines, but wants to jump in, lead, and create; but the biggest lesson she's faced so far this year is learning to trust those around her. "I can't do it all," she said. What has surprised

her most about the business is the amount of love she's received from the other trucks. "Even though we're direct competition, they've helped me figure out licensing, parking, permits."

SASSY SPOON

Sassy Spoon's Tamara Brown is a big supporter of community, as a business owner and a chef. Her truck serves gluten-free dishes made with locally sourced ingredients. She's committed to whole food (in fact, we shop at the same co-op) all year round, even when she's not on the truck. Her holistic nutrition training and an independent spirit led her to want to open her own business. The truck was a perfect entry into feeding people the food she's so passionate about. (Plus, those nutrient-dense vegetables and ethically raised meats are awfully tasty). "This is one crazy business! I have never experienced as much stress or anxiety as I have running this business. Food trucking is really hard work! The irony of the

situation is whether my 'healthy' truck is actually creating 'less health' for my own body. On the other hand, I've become friends with some wonderful people in the truck world who provide amazing support, advice, and help."

HOUSE OF HUNGER

The theme of the support in the industry runs through to Wesley Kaake of House of Hunger who said he was surprised by the camaraderie and support of the other trucks. Although, they took a different path to food truck ownership, "We originally wanted to open a doughnut shop downtown Minneapolis next to CVS in Skyscape. By the time the financing fell through I had spent 9 months working on it, quit my job, cashed out my stock and 401(k), and needed to do something fast. The city of Minneapolis kept mentioning food trucks to us when we would visit them while working on the doughnut shop and it didn't sink in until we knew the shop wasn't happening at that time." Now fans know they can count on Kaake and his team for hearty fare like deep-fried hot dogs, Philly cheesesteaks, and burgers. When the truck isn't out on the Minneapolis streets, they still manage to operate all year round with catering and events. Whenever they do have time, Kaake said they do fundraising for several nonprofits, although those that work with the GLBT community are closest to his heart.

That is a part of what makes these trucks so awesome. It's not just seeing their bright colors and smelling the tantalizing dishes, it's the community they foster with each other and us, their eaters. If that isn't a beautiful dose of summer sunshine for the soul, I don't know what is. ■



(from left) Cody Allen, Wesley Kaake, Esha Winfrey-Thomas of House of Hunger. Photo by Hubert Bonnet

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Kathy Griffin. Photo courtesy of Mystic Lake Casino Hotel.

KATHY GRIFFIN

MORE THAN JUST JOKES

BY SHANE LUECK

As a GLBT-identified journalist, whenever any interview begins with “Congratulations on the marriage equality there in Minnesota!” you know it’s going to be great. This is precisely how Kathy Griffin greeted me as we began our conversation ripe with laughter.

Griffin, who has long been involved in GLBT causes by attending rallies, speaking at Capitol Hill, and the like, has followed the struggle to gain marriage equality nationally. With nothing but kind words to say about Senator Al Franken and other parties who helped pass the legislation here in Minnesota, she says, “It’s so important for voters, especially the GLBT community, to know who is in their corner and who isn’t and why.”

It could be wise to listen to her advice, as Griffin is the one who is quick to hold politicians accountable for their voting records—most notably, making it a point in the past to call out Michele Bachmann on her anti-gay stances.

The two-time Emmy winner and recent Grammy winner (finally, after being nominated in the Best Comedy Album category six times over the years), is quick to threaten a phone call to Cher or Bette Midler in order to tattle on you if you don’t follow your local politics. The same threat was voiced against me when I was hesitant to answer when Minnesota is holding its primary elections. “Primaries are so important,” Griffin says. “Everyone thinks voting for President is the big one, but the primaries are the game changers.”

As is typical of the name-dropping comedienne, it wasn’t long before Griffin seriously (yet coupled with a joke forcing me to promise not to judge her) voiced her support for Clay Aiken in his candidacy for a House seat in North Carolina’s second district. “I know I’ve given him s*** in my act in the past, but I absolutely support him,” she says.

Her act, which is coming to Minnesota June 13, is breaking records. The iconic stand-up star has received a Guinness World Records certificate for hosting the most televised stand-up specials of any comedian, male or female. Her record-breaking special, aptly titled *Record Breaker*, was the twentieth of her career, and Griffin shows no signs of stopping. Her first stand-up special, *HBO Comedy Half Hour* aired on Oct. 18, 1996. Since then, she’s gone on to perform shows like *Balls of Steel*, *50 and Not Pregnant*, and *Calm Down Grrl*.

With twenty television specials below her belt, Griffin has told her fair share of stories. Luckily for audiences, celebrities are constantly getting into new antics, which translates into new material for Griffin, most of which never makes it into her taped specials. “The stuff you’re going to hear live is the stuff I can’t say anywhere on television,” she says. “You have to come see me live.”

The stuff in question comes in many shapes and sizes. From performing on gay cruises (just ask her to share her knowledge about the “sex schedules” she finds on cabin doors) to her trademark celebrity-skewering, Griffin tells it like it is. Following some banter about the types of things which work themselves into her live show, Griffin questions, “Do you think Mystic Lake [Casino Hotel] can handle me? Can Mystic Lake handle what I’m bringing to Minnesota?” After joking she might blow the roof off the Land of 10,000 Lakes, she adds, “Am I going to have to bring a canoe to paddle away from the ruined building?”

Between fits of giggles, the self-proclaimed “D-lister” remarked on the camaraderie she feels with other female comedians, joking it is the “catty gay men” who like to pit women against one another. “We are in this together; I don’t feel competitive with my female contemporaries,” she says. “One thing I know about the LGBTQIA2—yes, I know all of the letters and numbers—I think one thing that women need to learn from the gay community is women need to

do a better job sticking together.”

Pausing to mention that she believes her audience in Minnesota *won’t* be primarily gay men, she makes a promise to hilariously educate the audience on all of the letters (and number!) in LGBTQIA2. Having been involved with the community for decades, Griffin adds, “One thing I admire is the ability to stick together and actually accomplish things. Obviously there is fighting within the community (as in any community) but when it comes down to it the LGBT community does a great job of sticking together and I don’t think women are quite there yet. I’m going to criticize hetero women for one second and say that sometimes hetero women get bogged down in competing, not having each other’s back, and not getting along when the chips are down.”

As a woman who identifies as a feminist, Griffin says hearing people proclaim that sexism in the comedy industry doesn’t exist makes her sick. Listing that almost all of the promoters, tour managers, and comedians are men, she says, “There is still a huge amount of sexism in stand-up comedy. If I’m doing morning radio, for example, they’ll go ‘You’re kind of funny for a chick. Normally I don’t think chicks are funny, but you’re kind of funny.’ To which I respond—which is always a conversation ender—I always say ‘Really? Would you say to an African American person, ‘Normally I think you’re lazy and shiftless, but you seem to work hard?’ And the conversation usually ends, but I’ve made my point.”

Griffin, who advocates for feeling comfortable in whatever skin you’re in, has been vocal about being pressured into a nose job at age 26 and her liposuction gone wrong just a few years ago. Joking that she would show the picture slides in her act “to the horror of the audience,” Griffin adds, “but I came up with a more radical solution: it’s called eating well and working out.”

With a five-mile walk every day, Griffin was able to find her bliss. “We all feel the pressure to do these intense workouts and get a personal trainer, and yet I have found after every diet pill and workout plan on the planet, the consistency of just a five-mile walk every day has been the greatest thing,” she says, sharing her body-positive philosophy. “Anybody can do it. Do something that’s consistent and fun and don’t pressure yourself to be perfect or stick to a plan that no one could possibly stick to.”

It’s this form of acceptance and support (and her great wit certainly helps) which has garnered Griffin her enormous GLBT fan base. She’s famously said, “They love me because I’m outrageous, and I love them as an audience because they’re the unshockable gays, which is what comedy should be about.” According to Griffin, she was the one in high school who went to prom with the gay friend (who is now a choreographer at Disney World) and has always been surrounded by “the gays.”

“We found each other organically,” she says, referring to it as a case of the chicken and the egg, not sure if she attracted gay men or they attracted her. Either way, she enjoys performing for GLBT audiences, calling them her favorite. “I started doing the gay clubs and getting a better response [to my act]. So, more gay friends followed. I find that gay audiences are more raucous, somewhat political, and knowledgeable. But I won’t discriminate. I’ll still welcome the eleven or twelve straight guys who were dragged there by their girlfriends.”

And we love her in return for her comedy, her activism, and her support. “I don’t know that I feel a responsibility for the community,” she says. “I just want to do whatever I can and I honestly feel a true sense of community.”

Kathy Griffin will be appearing at Mystic Lake Casino Hotel June 13 at 8:00 PM. For tickets, head to www.mysticlake.com. ■

OUR SCENE

BAR & CLUBS | BAROMETER | BY GEORGE HOLDGRAFER

2014 Twin Cities Gay Pool League (TCGPL) Year-End Tournament April 27 at the Town House

1. First Place Team (Year): Town House 2 (from left)–Troy, Joel, John, Brant

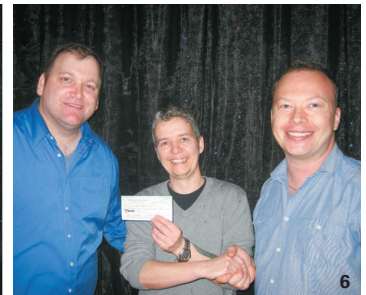
2. Second Place Team (Year): 19 Bar 2 (from left)–Scott, Jared, Jeremy, Nate

3. Third Place Team (Year): 19 Bar 1 (from left)–Norm, Gabriel, Jerry, Mary

4. First Place Individual (Year): Scott (19 Bar)

5. Second Place Individual (Year): Troy (Town House)

6. Troy (left) and Brant (right) of TCGPL presented a check to Rocki Simoes (center) of the GLBT Host Home Program of Avenues for Homeless Youth



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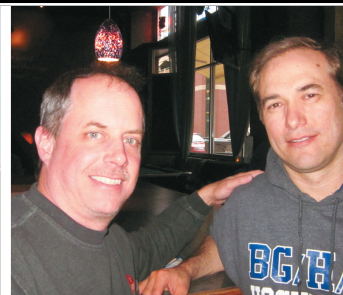
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HIV: A CALL TO ACTION

Here are the facts. There are 35.3 million people on this planet living with HIV and most of these people have limited access to any form of treatment. Every 6 minutes another person is infected with HIV and every 10 minutes someone dies from the disease. In the United States there are 1.1 million people living with HIV and 1 in 6 are unaware of it. Fifty thousand Americans are newly infected every year, a statistic that has not changed in over two decades. In Minnesota, there are approximately 7,000 people living with HIV, but this is probably an underestimate as there are many infected people who have never been tested. Last year there were 301 new HIV infections diagnosed in Minnesota and among those, 1/3 were diagnosed with AIDS at the time they are found to be HIV+. The global, national, and local burden of disease from this infection is staggering.

HIV INFECTED PEOPLE ON TREATMENT STILL HAVE A SHORTER LIFE SPAN, STILL HAVE ABNORMAL IMMUNE SYSTEMS, AND ARE NOW BEING DIAGNOSED WITH INFECTIONS, CANCERS, AND OTHER SERIOUS PROBLEMS THAT HAVE NOT BEEN SEEN BEFORE IN THIS POPULATION.

We have made significant progress in the treatment of HIV. There are new formulations of antiretroviral drugs that have been combined into one pill that can be taken only once a day. These drugs have provided significant clinical benefit with people living longer and living healthier. This is a remarkable achievement as it was not that long ago that a diagnosis of HIV meant you would soon die. However, it is really important to understand that treatment with these drugs is not a cure. HIV infected people on treatment still have a shorter life span, still have abnormal immune systems and are now being diagnosed with infections, cancers and other serious problems that have not been seen before in this population. Moreover, HIV+ people on ART are considered to be aging at a faster rate than someone the same age who is not HIV infected. We are seeing younger people becoming frailer and have an increased rate of heart disease, stroke, and blood clots. Beyond the personal turmoil this infection creates the cost to society is also quite large. The lifelong cost of care for HIV infected people is very expensive (up to \$1500/month for medications alone) and the cost for social programs to support this growing population is very large.

This disease is not going away. We can't cure it and we have no effective vaccines, microbicides, or devices to prevent transmission (except correct and consistent use of condoms and pre- or post-exposure prophylaxis). The natural question to ask today is why. In 2011, the United States federal government spent approximately 3.4 billion dollars on research into HIV and in 2012, 3.5 billion.

These investments are yielding important discoveries about how and why the virus causes AIDS, which provides new opportunities for treatment. The National Institutes of Health recently formed 3 large collaborative networks of scientists from all over the world to find the cure for HIV. Two scientists from the University of Minnesota (myself and Dr. Ashley Haase) belong to these "collaboratories" and the ideas and discoveries being made by these groups are amazing. Our goal is to turn these basic science discoveries into novel treatments that may lead to the cure. We are looking at entirely new "out of the box" ways to eradicate infected cells from the body. We are looking at new classes of drugs that might selectively kill cells that have HIV in them, novel ways of making a person's CD4 T cells unable to be infected with HIV using gene therapy, and ways to "train" the immune system to find infected cells and eliminate them. However, progress along these lines is frustratingly slow; scientific discovery often sets its own pace.

Once we have an idea that could turn into a human treatment the progress at testing these ideas in humans is also too slow. We have a complex set of rules and regulations about what we can and can't do in human studies and legal issues that have to be sorted out before we can start any human trial. But, once a study is up and running, the single biggest barrier to human research is a lack of participants (volunteers). If recruitment goals are not met, a study is shut down and what might have been a great idea that would significantly advance the field becomes a missed opportunity. This has hap-

pened many times in human research, across all diseases, not just HIV. Nationally, the rate of participation in human studies is declining. This is not a problem that affects just HIV/AIDS, this is a serious problem in every topic area. Recent data suggests that a total of 21% of people who respond to study advertising show up for a screening visit and of those, 7% enroll into the trial and 5% complete it. If a study needs 500 people to complete the protocol to know if the intervention works, that means 10,000 people have to pick up the phone and express interest in the study.

I remember the activism of the 1980's and 1990's that led to major advances in the care of people with HIV/AIDS. Organizations like ACT UP demanded progress and pushed for accelerated approvals of promising therapies. This led the FDA to fast track the approval of antiretroviral therapies that are the reason we saw the rates of death from HIV/AIDS decrease dramatically in the mid-1990s. Human studies filled quickly. That sense of urgency is gone. Perhaps people believe that we have solved the problem of HIV/AIDS but given the number of people infected, the new clinical problems we are facing, and our inability to cure the infection, that is not the case. Part of the complacency may be due to the fact that the place where this disease is most devastating is beyond our borders; we don't see it as much as we did before. Walking into a clinic in Kampala, Uganda to see a room full of people with advanced AIDS and no access to medicines who will soon die from AIDS reminds me of the early days of the epidemic in the US, only on a much larger scale. Today,

in 2014, the rate of infection in pregnant women in South Africa is up to 40%. We simply can't afford to be complacent about this disease.

I believe that we can, and will cure HIV but that it will take the effort of everyone. The Twin Cities has a rich and engaged clinical research community studying HIV/AIDS. There are many opportunities to get involved, even if you are not HIV-infected. Dr. Keith Henry at Hennepin County Medical Center (HCMC) has several studies looking at novel anti-HIV drugs that may become part of first line regimens if they are successful. But we won't know unless we do the study. Dr. Frank Rhame at Allina is looking at new treatments for Hepatitis C, a common co-infection with HIV that makes HIV harder to treat and accelerates the pace of the disease. Dr. Jason Baker, also at HCMC, is studying the phenomenon of accelerated aging in HIV and looking at novel interventions to slow that down. Our group at the University of Minnesota is trying to understand why we can't completely restore immune function with ART. We have a study to see if an FDA-approved drug can improve CD4 T cell counts with antiretroviral therapy and help to restore immunity. We are also looking at how we can improve antiretroviral therapy so it is more suppressive. We all need committed, community-minded people to enroll in these studies so that we can advance the field and hopefully provide better options for people living with HIV.

I can give you a recent example of a clinical study that has fundamentally changed the way we think about antiretroviral therapy. We wanted to know why the current drugs do not do a better job of sup-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 52 ➔




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Health Quarterly

pressing the virus from replicating and why some people have evidence of ongoing virus replication, despite having an undetectable viral load (a measure of virus in the blood). Fourteen committed volunteers allowed us to measure ART drug levels in cells from their lymph nodes and large intestine (where the virus actually replicates). We wanted to know if the drugs were actually getting to the site where the virus replicates. We found that drug levels are unexpectedly low in those tissues and that the amount of drug we measured correlated to the amount of virus replicating in those tissues (e.g., low drug level in lymph node was associated with more virus replication in that lymph node). In most of the volunteers we found evidence for ongoing, persistent virus replication in these tissue compartments, even though they had an undetectable viral load in their blood. To make that fundamental discovery, which is that the current drugs are not as suppressive as we originally thought, required the dedication and commitment of these volunteers. We now know that our inability to get the drugs into these tissues is a barrier to cure and that we have to fix the problem by first understanding why they don't get in and then figuring out how to get them in. Several labs have already started working on this, and that is because of those 14 volunteers.

It is important that you get involved. Find out what kind of study you might qualify for. Talk to your doctor about this. Look into options; there are lots of opportunities. Be a part of the cure.

For more information:

Dr. Schacker's research website:
www.hiv.umn.edu/

Dr. Baker & Dr. Henry's research website:
www.mmrf.org/research/hiv aids.html

Dr. Rhame's contact for research:
612-863-7046 ■

Timothy Schacker, MD, is Professor of Medicine and Director Program in HIV Medicine at the University of Minnesota. Dr. Schacker has developed an internationally recognized program in translational research at the University of Minnesota. He is the principal investigator of a federally funded program of projects designed to determine barriers to HIV eradication.

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Health Quarterly

WINGSPAN'S RAINBOW SUPPORT GROUP:

SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

For over 41 years, Wingspan Life Resources has served adults with Developmental Disabilities (DD) in the greater Twin Cities area. Based in St. Paul with a Residential Program providing 24 group homes in Ramsey and Hennepin counties, Wingspan also offers an In-Home Program for adults living on their own or with family. The organization's mission is to help people

challenged by age, ability, or health to realize their unique gifts, talents, and dreams.

Wingspan's Program Staff advise, "In our Rainbow Support Group meetings we find that members are concerned with being forced into heterosexual social situations, since that is typically the only available option for them to socialize. Some members are afraid of being 'outed' to their peers

and staff, which is understandable since many people with developmental disabilities are not their legal guardians. They are acutely sensitive to retaliation from family or others, such as being ostracized from family functions. Members may be reluctant to add another level of stigma by identifying themselves as members of the LGBT community. However, the primary concerns

members describe involve an overwhelming sense of isolation, lack of companionship, and lack of support concerning their sexual orientation."

The purpose of Rainbow Support Group is to provide 1) peer support for LGBT persons who have developmental disabilities; 2) a supportive space for education and interactive discussions regarding LGBT issues and topical discus-



sions such as: safe sex, dating and intimacy, setting healthy boundaries, issues of consent, pride and self esteem, and coming out to family and friends; 3) a place to feel safe, welcome, valued, and respected; 4) assistance with learning about and accessing LGBT events, resources, organizations, and locations within the community; 5) advocacy and outreach through sharing stories, receiving education about key issues, and learning about cultural and social opportunities; and 6) experiencing the benefits of peer support.

Rainbow Support Group (RSG) is for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to help them be comfortable with who they are. RSG gives them a safe, comfortable environment to talk about their issues and feelings, decide when they are ready to come out, and how to come out to other people. Wingspan's Chief Operating Officer, Therese Davis, believes, "I think it is important to have Rainbow Support Group because there used to be no support within the intellectual disability system for people who use services and are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning their sexual identity. It is our responsibility to help people with intellectual disabilities be safe in their exploration of their sexuality. Participants discuss the same concerns as other gay people, but they do it in a support system that recognizes their unique perspective."

How Wingspan Hopes To Impact Social Change

According to Wingspan's RSG Program Director, Maureen Merrill, "Two key areas we focus on are reducing isolation and increasing safety. In the past, LGBT persons with disabilities did not know each other and were sometimes kept away from each other or anyone they were interested in or had a relationship with.

Some of these adults are forbidden by their families to even consider having a loving, intimate relationship with another person. Many of these families would be even more condemning of a same-sex relationship. The group gives our members a chance, often for the first time, to be surrounded by other LGBT persons and to talk about common experiences. Many members have never said 'I am gay,' or 'I am a lesbian' before."

The group's current ages span from 18 to mid 40s, though the range has been as high as age 70. One of the youngest members of RSG, Sam, says, "Rainbow Support Group changed my life. My parents are very supportive, but I felt isolated and alone and this group has really helped me in so many ways." Sam will be graduating from a Transition Program in June. His passion is music and he attributes this to his mother—a music teacher who encouraged musical experiences at a young age. Sam has shown leadership in Wingspan's recently formed Glee Club which includes several of his peers from Rainbow Support Group. Although RSG is not intended as a dating group, relationships have sometimes formed; Tim and Bill from Wingspan's In-Home Program met at Rainbow Support Group and have been dating for three years.

People who have developmental disabilities are, by definition, vulnerable to people who may take advantage of them in different ways. There are many horror stories of people with developmental disabilities having been abused physically, emotionally, and/or sexually. Heterosexuals with developmental disabilities are more likely to have had some family members try to talk to them about safe touch, strangers, and relationships. Parents or family of LGBT people with de-

velopmental disabilities may be more likely to simply forbid discussion about relationships and sex altogether.

In his book *Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender People with Developmental Disabilities and Mental Retardation*, Dr. John Allen, MS wrote in 2003:

"Although the process of coming out is complicated, it is doubtful that even those who are most understanding can imagine the obstacle of trying to navigate the intricacies of sexual orientation discovery by a person with a developmental disability. Acknowledging that people with mental retardation are sexual is a new development in the human service field, but one that is still facing pre-Stonewall mentality regarding those who are gay. Although people with mental retardation are given unprecedented freedom to make personal vocational decisions, there is an unfounded expectation that they do not have sexuality—let alone homosexuality.

As antiquated institutions are closed and residents are moved into more mainstream settings, some human rights issues have been inadequately addressed. Perhaps it is because of an enduring paternalistic attitude that people with mental retardation are childlike and require protection from adult experiences. Personal biases of support staff and guardian family members also serve to restrict individual freedoms. With great strides being made in human services, hopefully a new understanding is emerging which recognizes that healthy sexuality is a natural component of being an adult.

Just as heterosexuals do not have a monopoly on sexuality, the potential for having a relationship is not limited to intellectual privilege—it is part of what makes us human. What the Rainbow Support Group has accomplished and

will hopefully continue to illuminate is the understanding that people with Developmental Disability are entitled to a whole life experience, including discovering and enjoying their sexuality."

With LGBT adults who are developmentally disabled, family, staff or guardians may not know they are gay or may not want them to admit or talk about it. The persons with disabilities may be left with odd ideas about how gay/lesbian/bi or transgender people conduct their lives—based on whatever they have gleaned from movies, pornography, or stereotypes. In Rainbow Support Group, members reinforce for each other wise, safe practices and ways of dealing with relationships, strangers, etc.

A first-time grantee of PFund, Wingspan will utilize grant dollars to expand opportunities for Rainbow Support Group to participate in more LGBT community events and to advance its social change mission in advocating for the group. Rainbow Support Group currently meets on the last Wednesday evening of each month at its program office in St. Paul, and sessions may include outings such as a summer pool party, attending gay pride festivities, a haunted hayride in the Fall, going to a One Voice Mixed Chorus concert, and other LGBT community events, and holiday celebrations. There is no fee for participation, and the group is open to LGBT adults with developmental disabilities who are not Wingspan residents or clients. ■

For more information about Rainbow Support Group, please contact Program Director, Maureen Merrill, at mmerrill@wingspanlife.org or 651-644-2665 X 102.

Darolyn Gray is the Development Officer at Wingspan Life Resources and can be contacted at dgray@wingspanlife.org or 651-646-3846 X 246.

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LOW TESTOSTERONE: NOT JUST A MAN'S ISSUE



As is well-known, testosterone is one of the major male sexual hormones. It is also a female hormone with a significant role in sexual stimulation and satisfaction. Obviously, the amount of testosterone produced naturally by the male body is significantly higher than that produced by the female body. Even though it is well-known that women have menopausal symptoms from rather sudden decreases in estrogen levels starting typically in the fifth decade of life, it is not well-known that men have a gradual "menopause" from lowering testosterone levels starting in the mid 20s which is typically complete by early to mid 50s. Because of this gradual menopause, men seldom have the menopausal symptoms that women have. Rather, men have symptoms which are of gradual onset such as loss of muscle, tiredness, mild depression, loss of concentration, or difficulty obtaining or maintaining an erection. Interestingly, women tend to produce low but constant levels of testosterone during most of their lives.

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GRADUAL MENOPAUSE,
MEN SELDOM HAVE THE
MENOPAUSAL
SYMPTOMS THAT
WOMEN HAVE.

Low testosterone is easily diagnosed by blood tests. Furthermore, "T" levels are divided into active "T" and nonactive "T" levels. Thus a normal "T" level needs further explanation. When asking your MD for a "T" level, in particular ask about the active "T" level. A man in his 60s may have a normal "T" level but it frequently will be almost entirely inactive "T".

Replacement "T" comes in many forms with the two most common being either a topical gel or in an injectable form. The gel has the advantage of being easily applied daily but the disadvantage of daily good skin preparation prior to applying as well as some potential greasy feeling and clothes contact. The injectable has the advantage of once a week usage, very accurate correction to normal active "T" levels, and a short time needed to complete the weekly injection. The most common disadvantage of injectable "T" is the discomfort of the injection which can be minimized by using a small needle. A note about both gel and injectable "T" is that "T" is very heavily regulated by the DEA.

For men, when selecting an MD to be screened and treated for low "T", PLEASE find a physician who routinely tests and treats for "Low T". You may find an MD who can diagnosis "Low T" appropriately BUT will not accurately or appropriately treat for "Low T". In the Twin Cities area, a few select urologists and endocrinologists are capable of diagnosing and treating for "Low T". For women a "Low T" blood test is the norm. Yet women who are treated appropriately with testosterone frequently find significant greater enjoyment from intercourse (some reaching climax for the first time) without the dreaded fear of being masculinized. Women who wish to be tested and treated for "Low T" need to find an urologist, gynecologist, or endocrinologist that can test, treat, and appreciate the sexual satisfaction appropriate "T" treatment can give. ■



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PORSCHE CAYMAN



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Let us not beat around the bush – everyone knows what a Porsche is all about.

Porsche is not an elusive brand. Yet, the brand from Stuttgart sits in a place on the automotive totem pole that seems unobtainable and exclusive to the average motorist. Its enthusiasts are amongst the most loyal of any brand sold anywhere in the world. An owner joins the Porsche Club of America, attends their regional track days, and properly cares for their vehicle, even if it is not a 911.

As an automotive journalist, it is somehow expected that you have driven a Porsche sometime during your career. It is the one brand that draws attention to your work. Everyone wants to read about a Porsche; primarily a 911, but any model would do.

I have a confession to make, however. I have never driven a Porsche in my life. I have been around them, sat in them, and wondered how hard could it be to drive one. All of that has been put to bed, as I have driven my first Porsche in my half-century of living.

When you drive a Porsche, you are supposed to have a rush of adrenaline. The roar from the

tailpipe denotes something dramatic and exciting. A Porsche is supposed to rush you through traffic without scaring the living daylights out of you.

Still, you have to drive a 911. It is still a great car, yet some have balked at its price. Owners of 911s will continue to buy them, at any price. But, what if you are part of that group who still wants the '911 Experience' without the 911 price tag?

Thankfully, Porsche created the Cayman. It began as a Boxster, the original small Porsche sports car created as a two-seat roadster. The Cayman was added to create a closed coupe experience with the Boxster's mid-engine placement and smaller footprint. Now in its second generation, both the Boxster and Cayman received a plethora of praise by bringing back the purity of the older 911s.

Count me in that chorus. Having ridden in an old 911, there are certain aspects of that car that denote a wonderful experience of corner tracking, outright drama from the rear engine, and everything else that speaks to the 911 Experience. From the driver's seat, it felt as I just got into a 1978 911SC looking for a canyon road to carve.

It is tough to ignore the modernity of the Cayman. Certainly, the engine is in front of the rear axle. There are plenty of buttons and switches to change anything from the driving aspect to the navigation screen. The instrumentation may be missing a dial or two, but you have to admit there is a classic Porsche feeling when you sit low in

the seat and position yourself behind the wheel.

The cabin represented a less cluttered version of the current brand interior design. There are still plenty of buttons to use. You can open the front lid and rear hatch with a couple of buttons on the doorsill. You can switch your driving dynamics right by the gear lever. Plus, there are switches and buttons for the infotainment system and so forth.

Unlike the 911, there are only two seats in the Cayman. Though the seatback tended to be a bit stiff, you can find comfort in the cushion, where the insert between the bolsters is wider than most sports cars and exotics. You are guaranteed to be locked in behind the wheel with these seats, featuring a plethora of power-assisted adjustments to manage a lot of kinds of bodies. Keep in mind that you have the engine enclosure right behind you, all sealed and quiet for your pleasure.

To make your summer getaway worth the two seat occupancy in Cayman, there are two cargo holds for your weekend bags—one up front and one in the hatch. Both will fit a good-sized duffel each with three days worth of clothes and your sundries. If you must, Porsche would also furnish your vehicle-designed luggage with prices ranging from \$175.00 to \$775.00 per piece.

The Cayman S I drove had 325 horsepower on tap from a 3.4 liter horizontally opposed, six-cylinder engine. Combined with Porsche's PDK trans-

mission, this is a dream to drive. The immediate response from the throttle makes quick work of first gear. Second took a bit longer than one would like, but it will go through the remaining gears in quick fashion. Press the Sport button and the Cayman S comes alive. The only soundtrack that mattered was the one that had just been turned to 11—the exhaust note. All gears get a quick change in Sport and you could possibly be in another state in a matter of seconds.

In case you are wondering, the sticker of a PDK-equipped Cayman S states you might average 24MPG in terms of fuel economy. This could be one of the most efficient sports cars in the market.

While Porsche sports cars usually have a firm ride, the Cayman S keeps it compliant and comfortable. There is a bit of a lean you feel, but that

can be remedied with another button to adjust the shock dampening. Nineteen-inch Goodyear Eagle F1s keep the Cayman S planted through the tarmac and tried to manage bad road surfaces while making butter out of the smooth ones.

Steering in the Cayman reminds you of what a sports car is supposed to act like. It is perfectly weighted with great on-center feel and quick response. Brakes were good, with excellent pedal response towards solid normal stops.

The Cayman lineup starts at \$53,595 for a “basic” model with 275 horsepower. Upgrade the more powerful S model, and your sticker jumped to \$64,795. Our tester came to \$88,120—almost \$22,000 in options! If you are looking for something more hardcore, the GTS model offers 15 more horsepower and near-track tuned drive for

another \$11,000.

Obviously, you probably thought I would drive a 911 and that would take care of everything Porsche. To get a flavor of what Porsche has been up to, you do not necessarily have to drive a 911. However, any Porsche you drive still has the shield that reminds you of where it all came from. It also reminds you of where it stands amongst the pantheon of automobiles.

The Cayman presents a different argument. It is a two-seater that is fun to drive while remaining true to the traditional tenets of Porsche’s sports cars. Maybe that is enough for you to decide.

Besides, what car would you rather spend your Summer in the Cities (and elsewhere) in? I am thinking the Cayman would be a great choice for a many summers of road worthy adventures. ■



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Puppy Vortex

This has been a terrible winter. First there was the Polar Vortex. Initially, I felt it fitting revenge for our attempts to kill off the polar bears with whatever type of atmosphere-choking gas (carbon monoxide? dioxide? I can never remember) we're spewing from our SUVs and pig farms.

But when the PV continued to blast into April (!), I began to grow resentful. Especially after it froze my water pipes twice and made everyone on the entire continent grumpy.

And just as the PV began to retreat, one of my dogs died and, then, my dad died a week later.

It's hard to put a positive spin on any of this, even for an optimist like me. But in the depths of this cold madness, something adorable happened.

It all started late at night—a couple days after my dog died and a few days before my dad died. I was self-medicating with a bottle of Barolo and watching YouTube videos of puppies doing what puppies do best—rolling around like drunken bowling balls and squeaking. I happened upon a video of a sleepy French bulldog puppy heroically trying to keep its eyes open before falling asleep face-first into a bowl of food.

Immediately, I knew it would be the best idea ever to get a French bulldog puppy. (Yes, I was drunk.) So, I promptly found a breeder online and sent in a deposit. And, then, just like a puppy, I fell asleep face-first into a bowl of food.

The next morning, I completely forgot about my puppy commitment and went about the grim business of tending to my dad's failing health. A few days later, I was stunned to receive an email inviting me to pick up the puppy.

The email explained that since the puppy was from an Amish breeder, the communication was being sent by a "technology emissary" and I was

not to respond to it. Instead, I was commanded to drive to Amish country to pick up the pup.

I did a lot of stupid, impulsive things while my dad was dying. I bought a boat. I contacted an old girlfriend through Facebook. I binged on brain-leaching reality TV. And I drank too much wine (which explains everything listed above). Now that his transition is complete, I'm mopping up the consequences.

The day after my dad died, I wearily drove to the Amish farm fully prepared to explain the situation and renege on the puppy. I was greeted by a stern Amish man and his weirdly silent wife, who refused to make eye contact. The man explained that this was the last of the litter and it had to go to make room for a new batch. They were clearly operating some type of Old World puppy mill.

I feared the surplus pup would be served for Easter dinner if I didn't rescue it. (This also served as rationalization for getting a purebred instead of a mutt from a shelter. This was a rescue dog! I was rescuing it from the Amish!)

She was released from her austere cell looking like a cross between a pot-bellied pig and a bunny, happily romping to me with no clue of how close she came to being served in a stroganoff. I scooped her up and took her to my car. As I did the sun appeared from behind the steely clouds. Since she's been with me, the daffodils have bloomed and the PV has returned to the North Pole.

I'll return to my lesbian nonsense in future columns. But after this harsh winter, I thought we could all use a reminder of how an unexpected blast of ridiculous charm can chase away the clouds and make you remember why life is fun. ■

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(800) 248-AIDS (statewide)
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www.mnaidproject.org

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Seinfeld Boys

I'm at Wilde Roast Café in one of those comfy fancy-looking armchairs by the fire. I have coffee and am typing on a MacBook, so I feel very writerly. I'm wearing my eyeglasses to look at my computer screen even though I'm nearsighted and they do me no good. They add another layer to my writerlyness. Perhaps people will think I'm writing a screenplay that no studio will ever look at. Or maybe a formulaic novel in which we learn at the climax that the protagonist has all along been the villain. But the thought is conceited. People are going about their business, paying me no mind, and my glasses make my eyes burn. I take them off.

"Is anyone sitting here?" I hear. I look up to see a handsome man, probably in his fifties, standing by the chair next to me. He's tall, maybe 6'2", with wide shoulders and a thick waist.

"Only if you sit there," which is my attempt at a clever reply. He fake laughs and sits down.

I return to my laptop, where a blank Word document stares back at me. I don't want to write, so instead I wonder whatever happened to that guy I went out on that date with in college, the one who told me he ate grass. Let me close Word and open Facebook to search for him.

"I'm over this weather," my new neighbor says. I turn to him. He's pulling a laptop out of his bag.

"Me too." I have no clever reply, so I pull out my Southern card—I play it whenever I don't know what to say: "Yeah, I'm from North Carolina. I'm not used to this."

"Oh, really? How long have you been here?" He's reaching behind a small table separating us, fumbling to find a power outlet for his computer.

"Almost five years."

He chuckles. "Shouldn't you be used to

the weather by now?"

"Yes, but I couldn't think of anything else to say to you."

He laughs. I blush. He finds the power outlet and settles back into his chair.

"I'm not good talking about weather," I say awkwardly.

Uncomfortable pause. He looks down at his computer in silence. *That was an odd way to end a conversation.*

"Sorry," he says, "I was trying to find something else to say to you, but I kept coming back to weather."

I like this guy.

"This is kind of like one of those awkward airplane conversations, yeah?" I say, "You know, when you try talking to the possibly very talkative and/or awkward stranger sitting next to you."

"Not until I ask you what part of North Carolina you're from, even though I already know I won't know where it is you're talking about."

"A pivotal role in any airplane conversation." I sip my coffee. "Hope Mills, North Carolina. Town of small cafés and big gossip."

"Oh my god, I love that place! I'm sure I have an obscure cousin somewhere out there!"

I immediately want to be his friend. He's outgoing and hilarious.

"I reckon I should tell you that I'm Justin," I say and wonder whether or not I should stick out my hand. It's awkward sitting side-by-side like this.

"Reckon, Justin? *Reckon*? Really?" He has this fantastic smile that makes me want to swoon.

"I'm Rob." We don't shake hands.

"I was being sarcastic," I say, which is a total lie. He rolls his eyes.

"Are you writing? What are you writing?" he asks.

"I don't know yet. Maybe a status update."

"Oh, you young'ns and your Facebook."

"Young'ns, Rob? *Young'ns*? Really?"

Rob's a rare breed for Minneapolis. Scratch that. Rob's a rare breed period. He's charming without trying and social without hesitation. He's just the right kind of honest. And he reads people well, I sense. Is it a generational thing? I'm 27 and somewhat social, but dorky and outrageous. Also, it seems that people my age, like my college date, apparently do things like eat grass. Rob's just cool.

No. It's not generational. Almost never does this happen. Strangers don't say hello without sufficient alcohol consumption or a "networking event" excuse.

Rob and I have known each other for only a few minutes, but he has me longing for more of him. Not him specifically, but rather him, the breed. I'm somehow reminded of *Seinfeld*, and I'm not sure why. Maybe because the show was about nothing, as is our conversation, as is my unexpected craving for talking to strangers, as is my recounting this story to you.

Rob and I chat for another 15 or 20 minutes. He tells me a story about an 80 year-old woman who died next to him on an airplane. I tell him about a guy on an airplane who vomited on my shoe.

I've lost track of time and realize I'm late to an appointment.


"Shit, I gotta go," I say and shut my laptop.

"But you didn't write anything," he says.

I stand up and start wrapping up my charger cord.

"Maybe I'll write about you." ■

Say hello. ThroughTheseEyes.JustinJones@gmail.com.



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